

ARTICLE APPEARS
ON PAGE E 23WASHINGTON POST
14 July 1984**JACK ANDERSON****Thousands Still
Desperately
Fleeing Laos**

Catastrophe and conflict have become commonplace in Laos, a faraway land abused by the communists who rule it. Thousands of Laotians, most of them Hmong tribesmen from the hills, risk their lives to escape across the Mekong River into Thailand.

Many are persecuted because they were U.S. allies during the Vietnam war. Their travail is described in a secret cable from the U.S. Embassy in Vientiane.

The cable states that "many people in this country have had a pretty rough time." This has caused "sur-reptitious flight from the country by Lao and others who feel themselves threatened by the [communist] regime or who see grim economic prospects under it."

No early end to this flood of misery is likely, according to a Defense Intelligence Agency report, because "the Laotian communists are determined to pacify the Hmong and integrate them into the new order." But the tribesmen, the report says, "will vehemently struggle to maintain their way of life free of government interference."

My associate Dale Van Atta visited Thailand recently and spoke to

Laotian refugees who have reached the dubious haven of Thai refugee camps and detention centers. They had harrowing tales to tell.

The stories most deeply etched in the hearts of the escapees involved babies—those who were born along the escape trail and died during its rigors, those killed by soldiers and those who died from inhaling too much opium smoke, blown in their faces to calm them and prevent crying that could betray the party to communist troops.

Van Atta's interpreter, Pongkaset Suwannakoon, told about a refugee mother whose baby began to cry as they were stealing into a raft to cross the Mekong. Afraid the Pathet Lao soldier patrolling the river bank would hear, she put her hand over the baby's mouth. But in her panic the mother covered the infant's nose as well, and by the time the raft reached the Thai side of the river, the baby was dead.

The ordeal of escape was described by You Toua Xiong, 36, a Hmong leader who fled his village with nine relatives in February.

They crossed a dam north of Vientiane by boat, then started toward the border in a small truck. Other hopeful escapees joined until 26 were crammed into the truck.

At the Mekong, they obtained two small boats, and made repeated crossings by night. With 10 refugees left on the Laotian bank, the boats went back for another pickup.

Suddenly the refugees on the

Thai shore heard gunfire, then silence. The boats never returned.

World Bank sexism: For five years Susana Mendaro has been fighting a lonely, losing battle against sex discrimination at the World Bank in Washington. Mendaro, 40, is an Argentine who originally was a researcher at the agency before being recommended for promotion to consultant.

In 1979, she was transferred to the Latin American division at the urging of the division chief, who was impressed with her work. She was sent to Mexico with a team for appraisal of a regional project.

But this step up proved to be her downfall. Mendaro said she was not allowed to deal with Mexican officials—because she was a woman. Bank officials, who do not refute some of her essential charges, said the meetings were too "delicate."

When she complained, her supervisor suggested in a "joking and friendly manner," according to the bank—that she undergo a sex-change operation. Mendaro also charges she was verbally and physically harassed by a male consultant on the trip. The bank denies this.

After she complained, she was abruptly let go. She went to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which said it lacked jurisdiction because the bank is an international agency. A U.S. District Court suit met the same fate. Her complaint to the bank's administrative tribunal is under review.